



School Program Leading The Way

Kokomo, state prime participants in national engineering program

By JOHN DEMPSEY

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One decision Steve Healy made as superintendent of Kokomo-Center Schools in 2000 continues to resonate through the corporation today.

Healy made the decision to integrate Project Lead the Way — a pre-engineering program designed to lead students into the profession — into Kokomo High School's curriculum.

"He was the first superintendent to start the project in Indiana," said Michael O'Hair, associate dean for statewide technology and engagement who oversees Purdue University's Project Lead the Way involvement and co-chairman of the Indiana PLTW Leadership Team.

"He's a pioneer. I let everyone know this started in Kokomo. It was offered the first time in Kokomo and now it is in 135 schools.

"He implemented this before Purdue even got involved officially."

Project Lead the Way promotes partnerships between education and the private sector with the hope of increasing the quality and the number of engineers graduating from American colleges and universities.

Nearly 1,800 students in Kokomo-Center schools are involved in PLTW. Statewide, the numbers stand at about 14,000 in 135 schools. That's second only to New York, where the program began in 1997-98.

Nationwide, PLTW is in 1,300 schools in 45 states.

O'Hair introduced Healy to PLTW.

"He'd asked me to come and take a look at a program that was coming out. Dick Blaze of the University of Rochester did the presentation," Healy recalled. "Mike asked me what I thought.

"I said it sounded great. We've all been involved in projects that come and go and we decided that we were willing to give it a try for a year or so. After that, it sold itself."

The work begun by Healy, now superintendent of Eastern Howard Schools, and O'Hair, and the success the project has had in Indiana has led to the state organization being recognized by the national office.

Indiana's Project Lead the Way is administered by Purdue University's College of Technology and Indiana's Department of Education and Department of Workforce Development.

Several board members have Kokomo ties, including Healy and O'Hair. Others include former



Delphi Delco CEO Don Almquist, Thomas Sheehan, retired president of Syndicate Sales, Kevin Clancey of Delphi and Kevin Taylor, the Purdue Kokomo School of Technology director and co-affiliate director.

O'Hair sees PLTW as a useful tool for the future of Kokomo and its economic development.

The bottom line, O'Hair says, "is all about creating jobs which pay well and provide value back into the economy."

He related it to the start of Inventrek, which seeks to help create new high-tech companies in the Kokomo area.

"You grow these companies," O'Hair said, "and they become a pipeline to our schools.

"Basically, we have to look out for ourselves. I've lived in Kokomo for 30 years and I'm concerned about its future. I have two granddaughters and I'm concerned about what it will be like for them in 20 years."

Healy said the project provides the type of coursework students will be seeing more of in the future.

"As the students plan their careers, they're going to be taking courses that work together, an integrated coursework, and lead them in that direction," he said.

"Those classes utilize a lot of science and math as well as technology. Those are the best types of courses you can get. It helps students see why taking certain courses, the integration of the courses, is more meaningful than each of them standing alone."

PLTW is constantly developing new ideas, the Eastern superintendent said.

"It's constantly evolving to the next level. There is an area for aerospace and biotechnical engineering that they working on," he said, "and they're going to be adding biomedical sciences."

Five classes are offered through the Kokomo Area Career Center. Healy said Eastern offers the first three now, with students being able to go to the career center for the last two.

"Another positive aspect is that you get credits through Purdue industrial technology so students can get dual credit for high school and college," he said.

"Project Lead the Way is one of those things people see as still growing. I think what you have happening is not the European approach of tracking 13- or 14-year-olds," Healy added, "but the opportunities for students to follow the interests they have and see those as a career path.

"The biggest part of it is just making the students realize they have to work hard and keep their grades up to follow that career path."

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